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C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 00476 COMBINED SECTION

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DEPARTMENT PASS TO NSC DIRECTOR JUDGE CLARK AND EDWARD SANDERS AND NADINE JACOBSON OF SENATOR PERCY'S STAFF

E.O. 12065: GDS 01/21/88 (PAGANELLI, ROBERT P.) OR-M  
 TAGS: PEPH, SY, US, XF  
 SUBJECT: CODEL PERCY: MEETING WITH SYRIAN PRESIDENT ASSAD JAN. 19.

1. (C-ENTIRE TEXT)

2. SUMMARY. SENATOR PERCY MET FOR MORE THAN TWO HOURS WITH PRESIDENT ASSAD. MEETING, WHICH WAS WARM AND CORDIAL, FOLLOWED THREE HOUR SESSION WITH FONMIN KHADDAM. SENATOR

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FOCUSED ON ISSUES CONCERNING THE PEACE PROCESS AND SYRIAN VIEWS TOWARD IT. WITH REGARD TO US-SYRIAN CONTACTS, SENATOR NOTED VALUE OF CONTINUED HIGH LEVEL MEETINGS BUT PRESIDENT ASSAD SAID THAT THERE COULD BE LITTLE IMPROVEMENT IN OUR RELATIONS UNTIL THE U.S. MOVED TOWARD A MORE NEUTRAL POSITION ON THE ARAB-ISRAEL DISPUTE. HE CITED AS EXAMPLE OF U.S. BIAS IN FAVOR OF ISRAEL OUR CURRENT POSITION ON THE GOLAN HEIGHTS ISSUE. REGARDING SYRIAN ACCEPTANCE OF UNSC RESOLUTION 242, ASSAD OUTLINED IN SOME DETAIL THE SYRIAN POSITION, STATING THAT SYRIA VIEWED 242 AS BEING OVERTAKEN AND SUBSUMED WITHIN 338. SENATOR PERCY RAISED QUESTION OF SYRIAN POSITION ON THE FAHD EIGHT POINT PROPOSAL, SAYING THAT SYRIAN ENDORSEMENT COULD BE IMPORTANT IN TERMS OF THE ARABS PRESENTING A POSITIVE ALTERNATIVE PEACE PLAN. ASSAD STATED THAT HE DID NOT BELIEVE THE FAHD PROPOSAL COULD LEAD TO PRACTICAL RESULTS UNDER CURRENT CONDITIONS AND THE TIMING WAS NOT RIGHT FOR AN ARAB INITIATIVE. SENATOR ALSO RAISED SYRIAN OFFICIALS' AND MEDIA ATTACKS (EFFECTIVELY CONTROLLED) ON U.S. ACTS AND MOTIVES, NOTING THE HARMFUL EFFECTS THESE HAVE ON OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS. ASSAD AND KHADDAM COMMENTS ON IRAN-IRAQ WAR REPORTED SEPTEL.

END SUMMARY.

3. SENATOR PERCY, ACCOMPANIED BY MRS. PERCY, AMBASSADOR PAGANELLI, DCM RUGH, STAFF MEMBER BANNERMAN, AND POLOFF ABINGTON, HELD 2 HOUR AND 15 MINUTE MEETING JAN 19 WITH PRESIDENT ASSAD, WHO, CONTRARY TO STANDARD PROCEDURE, WAS ALONE EXCEPT FOR NOTETAKER AND TRANSLATOR. MEETING WITH ASSAD HAD BEEN PRECEDED BY THREE HOUR SESSION WITH FUNMIN KHADDAM. ASSAD, AS USUAL, WAS CORDIAL AND IN GOOD HUMOR. PRESIDENT ASSAD IMMEDIATELY ASKED HOW THE SENATOR'S MEETING THAT MORNING WITH KHADDAM HAD GONE, INTIMATING HIS RECOLLECTION OF THE MEETING SEVEN YEARS BEFORE THAT HAD BEEN STORMY AND THAT HAD INFURIATED THE SENATOR. SENATOR REPLIED TO ASSAD THAT IT HAD GONE SURPRISINGLY WELL.

4. US-SYRIA CONTACTS AND BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP:

THE SENATOR SAID THAT HE BELIEVED THERE SHOULD BE MORE

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HIGH LEVEL U.S. VISITS TO SYRIA AND AN INTENSIFIED DIALOGUE BETWEEN OUR TWO COUNTRIES WITH THE AIM OF DEFINING WHERE WE STAND ON THE PEACE PROCESS. ASSAD RESPONDED WITH AN ARABIC SAYING THAT IN DISASTER EVERYONE COMES TOGETHER. THE OPPOSITE SEEMED TO BE TRUE WITH REGARD TO THE U.S. AND SYRIA. ASSAD WELCOMED IMPROVED RELATIONS BETWEEN OUR TWO COUNTRIES BUT ON THE CONDITION THAT THE U.S. MOVE TOWARD A MORE "NEUTRAL" POSITION. OTHERWISE DISCUSSIONS WERE A "DIALOGUE OF THE DEAF". HE THEN RAISED THE ISRAELI GOLAN LEGISLATION, DESCRIBING THIS AS A FLAGRANT ACT AGAINST INTERNATIONAL LAW AS RECOGNIZED BY THE UNSC AS WELL AS THE U.S. THE U.S. WAS MOVING AWAY FROM THE OPPOSITION IT DEMONSTRATED LAST MONTH TO THE ISRAELI ACT TO A STANCE WHERE IT WAS ACQUIESCING IN WHAT ISRAEL DID, IF NOT SUPPORTING IT. SENATOR PERCY DISAGREED STRONGLY STATING THAT THE UNILATERAL ACTIONS THE U.S. HAD TAKEN HAD BEEN A MAJOR BLOW AGAINST ISRAEL. THIS HAD BEEN MADE VERY CLEAR DURING HIS DISCUSSIONS IN ISRAEL WHEN BEGIN AND OTHERS HAD STRONGLY URGED HIM TO INTERVENE WITH THE PRESIDENT TO RESTORE THE MOU AND LIFT THE OTHER MEASURES THE U.S. HAD TAKEN.

5. THE SENATOR CONTINUED THAT HE PERSONALLY HAD TAKEN A STRONG POSITION AGAINST THE ISRAELI ACT AND HAD FULLY EXPLICITLY SUPPORTED MEASURES, AS HAD THE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, TAKEN BY THE PRESIDENT TO DEMONSTRATE U.S. DISPLEASURE. FIRST THE AWACS SALE TO SAUDI ARABIA BY A VOTE OF 52-46 AND NOW, SEVERE PUNISHMENT (TO USE BEGIN'S WORDS) OF ISRAEL IN NON-IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MOU. THIS WAS THE FIRST TIME IN OVER 20 YEARS THAT AN AMERICAN ADMINISTRATION HAD ADOPTED SUCH A STRONG POSITION AGAINST ISRAEL.

6. UNSC RESOLUTION 242:  
SENATOR PERCY RAISED THE ISSUE OF SYRIA'S STANDING ALONE IN NOT SUPPORTING UN RESOLUTION 242 AND STATED THAT KHADDAM HAD TOLD HIM EARLIER THAT 242 WAS NOT AN ACCEPTABLE BASIS FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE BECAUSE IT DID NOT ADDRESS THE QUESTION OF THE LEGITIMATE RIGHTS OF THE

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PALESTINIANS. PERCY AGREED THAT 242 WAS INADEQUATE FROM THIS VIEWPOINT; HOWEVER, 242 WAS WIDELY ACCEPTED BY THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY, INCLUDING MOST OF THE ARAB WORLD AND EVEN THE USSR, AS THE BASIS FOR A MIDDLE EAST PEACE. SYRIA, BY NOT EXPLICITLY ACCEPTING 242, MADE IT APPEAR AS IF IT WERE NOT INTERESTED IN PEACE. SENATOR SUGGESTED THAT SYRIA RECONSIDER ITS POSITION ON THIS POINT.

7. ASSAD OUTLINED IN SOME DETAIL THE SYRIAN POSITION ON 242. SYRIA HAD NOT ACCEPTED THE RESOLUTION IN 1967 OR THEREAFTER. IN 1973, HOWEVER, THE UNSC ADOPTED RESOLUTION 338 WHICH SYRIA RECOGNIZED ON THE FOLLOWING CONDITIONS: 338 MEANT TOTAL ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL FROM THE TERRITORIES OCCUPIED IN 1967 AND ACKNOWLEDGING THE RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIANS. REGARDING 242, SYRIA VIEWED IT AS BEING OVERTAKEN AND SUBSUMED WITHIN 338. THIS CONTINUED TO BE SYRIA'S POSITION TODAY. THE SENATOR RESPONDED THAT IT WOULD BE IMPORTANT SYMBOLICALLY IF SYRIA COULD CLARIFY PUBLICLY ITS POSITION ON 242 AS OUTLINED BY THE PRESIDENT AND SAID HE WOULD DO SO ON SOME SUITABLE OCCASION.

8. FAHD 8 POINT PROPOSAL:

NOTING THE CURRENT DIVISIONS WITHIN THE ARAB WORLD, SENATOR PERCY SAID IT WAS IMPORTANT FOR THE ARABS TO ADOPT A MORE UNIFIED POSITION ON PEACE. HE NOTED THAT HE HAD HELD A NUMBER OF DISCUSSIONS IN THE PAST THREE WEEKS ON THE FAHD PROPOSAL, WHICH HAD BEEN WELCOMED BY THE PLU AND A MAJORITY OF THE ARAB STATES. PRESIDENT REAGAN HAD DESCRIBED IT AS A STEP FORWARD AND HE, SENATOR PERCY, HAD ALSO WELCOMED IT. IT WAS SURPRISING, THEREFORE, THAT SYRIA HAD MORE OR LESS JOINED ISRAEL IN OPPOSING THE PLAN. HE SUGGESTED THAT SYRIA MIGHT RECONSIDER ITS POSITION AND LOOK AT THE FAHD PLAN AS A SUITABLE BASIS FOR FUTURE NEGOTIATIONS.

9. ASSAD REVIEWED SYRIA'S POSITION ON THE FAHD PROPOSAL, STATING THAT IT WAS HIS VIEW THAT THERE WERE NO REASONABLE PROSPECTS THAT THE FAHD PROPOSAL COULD LEAD TO

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PRACTICAL RESULTS UNDER CURRENT CONDITIONS. IT WAS THE ARABS THAT WERE THE VICTIMS OF AGGRESSION NOT ISRAEL, AND THEREFORE, OTHER PARTIES SHOULD PUT FORTH INITIATIVES FOR ARAB REACTION AND NOT VICE VERSA. SYRIA HAD NEVER TOLD SAUDI ARABIA THAT IT WOULD NOT DISCUSS THE FAHD PLAN, BUT THE TIMING WAS NOT RIGHT FOR AN ARAB INITIATIVE. THE SENATOR RESPONDED THAT SYRIA STATES THAT IT IS A PRINCIPAL PARTY TO THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT. IF SYRIA WANTS TO PLAY A LEADERSHIP ROLE THEN IT SHOULD PUSH FOR A POSITIVE AND UNIFIED ARAB POSITION ON THE QUESTION OF PEACE. THIS WOULD BE WELCOMED BY THE ENTIRE ARAB WORLD, ESPECIALLY SAUDI ARABIA.

10. SYRIAN ACCEPTANCE OF ISRAEL:

DURING HIS MANY DISCUSSIONS ON HIS CURRENT TRIP, THE SENATOR SAID THAT HE FOUND A DEEP YEARNING FOR PEACE AMONG ARABS FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE TO WHOM HE HAD TALKED. THEY WANTED A JUST SOLUTION TO THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM, AN END TO CONFLICT, AND DIVERTING RESOURCES TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE. EARLIER IN THE DAY, KHADDAM HAD SAID THAT THERE COULD BE NO PEACE IN THE REGION UNTIL ISRAEL WITHDREW TO THE 1967 BORDERS AND A PALESTINIAN HOMELAND ESTABLISHED. PERCY SAID THAT HE BASICALLY EXDIS AGREED WITH THIS POSITION BUT AT THE SAME TIME THERE COULD BE NO PEACE UNTIL THE ARAB COUNTRIES RECOGNIZED THE RIGHT OF ISRAEL TO LIVE AS A SOVEREIGN NATION. ALMOST ALL ARAB COUNTRIES HAD ADOPTED THIS POSITION. WHAT WAS SYRIA'S STAND ON THIS QUESTION? UNDER WHAT CONDITIONS COULD SYRIA RECOGNIZE ISRAEL?

11. ASSAD RESPONDED TO THE SENATOR'S QUESTION WITH ANOTHER QUESTION BY ASKING WHETHER ISRAEL COULD RESCIND THE ANNEXATION OF THE GOLAN HEIGHTS AND RECOGNIZE THE LEGITIMATE RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIANS. IT WAS ISRAEL THAT WAS RELYING ON FORCE TO IMPOSE ITS WILL. UNDER QUESTION OF RECOGNITION OR NONRECOGNITION. SENATOR PERCY DISAGREED WITH THE THRUST OF ASSAD'S REMARKS, STATING THAT HE BELIEVED THAT THE REGION WAS MOVING TOWARDS PEACE. CAMP DAVID WAS AN EXPANSIVE PROCESS

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IN WHICH OTHER PARTIES COULD BE INVOLVED. THERE WAS THE PRECEDENT OF TOTAL ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL FROM SINAI AND ITS RETURN TO FULL EGYPTIAN SOVEREIGNTY. THIS SAME PROCESS COULD BE FOLLOWED FOR SOLVING THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM AND SYRIA'S CONFLICT WITH ISRAEL.

12. SENATOR PERCY INVITED THE AMBASSADOR TO CXENT ON THE DISCUSSION. THE AMBASSADOR SAID HE FOUND ASSAD'S ANALYSIS TO BE OVERLY PESSIMISTIC. WE ARE AT A TIME OF POSSIBLE OPPORTUNITY WHEREBY THE PEACE PROCESS COULD BE MOVED FORWARD. WE DO NOT UNDERESTIMATE THE DIFFICULTY OF BRINGING PARTIES IN THE REGION TOGETHER BUT WE ARE PURSUING AN ACTIVE POLICY OF WORKING TOWARDS PEACE. ONE MAJOR FRUSTRATION, HOWEVER, IS THAT ARAB GOVERNMENTS FREQUENTLY REMAIN PASSIVE AND FAIL TO GRASP AN OPPURTUNITY WHEN IT ARISES. WE WOULD HOPE THAT THE SARG WOULD TAKE THE LEAD IN COMING UP WITH A UNIFIED ARAB POSITION THAT COULD BE PUT ON THE NEGOTIATING TABLE. THIS WOULD BE A MAJOR CONTRIBUTION BY SYRIA.

#### 13. SYRIAN CRITICISM OF THE U.S.:

THE SENATOR SAID THAT CONSTANT SYRIAN CRITICISM OF U.S. ACTIONS AND MOTIVES HARM OUR BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP. SYRIAN STATEMENTS RECEIVE ATTENTION IN THE U.S. AND HAVE A NEGATIVE IMPACT ON AMERICAN POLICY MAKERS. THE SENATOR MADE AN APPEAL THAT ASSAD KEEP THIS IN MIND AND STATED THAT HE PERSONALLY WOULD DO WHAT HE COULD TO INCREASE UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN OUR TWO COUNTRIES.

#### 14. COMMENT:

ALTHOUGH MEETING WAS WARM AND CORDIAL, ASSAD ADOPTED TOUGH POSITIONS ON ALL ISSUES. AT THE BEGINNING OF THE MEETING, HE SEEMED SOMEWHAT PREOCCUPIED, PERHAPS BECAUSE OF NEWS THAT SYRIA HAD FIRED EARLIER IN THE DAY UPON ISRAELI AIRCRAFT OVER LEBANON. THIS SUBJECT, HOWEVER, DID NOT ARISE IN THE CONVERSATION. IT WAS ALSO EVIDENT THAT ASSAD WAS DEEPLY CONCERNED OVER THE ISRAELI LEGISLATION ON THE GOLAN HEIGHTS AND BITTER

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THAT THE U.S. HAD BACKED AWAY FROM WHAT HE PERCEIVED AS A HOPEFUL SHIFT IN U.S. POLICY LAST MONTH. HE GAVE NO INDICATION, HOWEVER, THAT SYRIA PLANNED TO PURSUE OTHER THAN POLITICAL MEANS IN DEALING WITH THE PROBLEM.

15. THIS CABLE CLEARED BY CODEL PERCY. PAGANELLI

END OF MESSAGE

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